

Friendship Heights TMD Advisory Committee Meeting
Summary – Meeting of Sept. 8, 2009

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Voting Members Present

April Birnbaum	Lerch, Early and Brewer, Representing New England Development
David Glass	Chevy Chase Village Board of Managers
Leonard Grant	Friendship Heights Village Council
William P. Farley	Town of Somerset
Mary Herman	Polinger Shannon and Luchs (Employer 50 or greater)
Bill McCloskey	Citizens Coordinating Committee on Friendship Heights
Robert Schwarzbart (Chair)	Friendship Heights Village Council
R. Mallory Starr (Vice Chair)	Somerset House Management Association

Non-Voting Members Present

Sandra L. Brecher	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
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TMD Staff Present

Nakengi Byrd	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Jim Carlson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services
Sheila Wilson	DOT/Transit Services Division-Commuter Services

Absent

Tiffany Gee	Chevy Chase Land Company
Chief Roy Gordon	Chevy Chase Village Police
Capt. Russell Hamill	Montgomery County Police
Kenneth Hartman	B-CC Services Center
Gregory Knoop	Oudens Knoop Knoop + Sachs Architects (Employer of fewer than 50)
Jessica Moore	The JBG Companies
Carlean Russell	Saks Fifth Avenue (Employer of 50 or greater)
Kenneth Williams	GEICO

Guests

Marc Esposito	Bloomingdale's
Hon. Nancy Floreen	Montgomery County Council
Bob Joiner	The Agenda News
Julian Mansfield	Friendship Heights Village
Alvin M. Morris	Friendship Heights Village Council
Leonard Mudd	Friendship Heights Village Council
Christina Norris	Wisconsin Place
David Torchinsky	Law Offices of Binstock, Torchinsky and Associates
Maurice Trebach	Friendship Heights Village Council

Items 1, 2 – Introductions/Agenda Review (additions/deletions): Members introduced themselves, and the July minutes were approved with changes.

Item 3 – Chair's Comments: Chairman Robert Schwarzbart announced that Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia will be discussing and signing his new book Making Your Case at the Friendship Heights Village Center on Monday, 9/14/09 at 7pm.

Mr. Schwarzbart recognized three departing committee members:

- **Mary Herman** representing Polinger Shannon & Luchs;
- **Carlean Russell** representing Saks Fifth Avenue; and
- **Greg Knoop** representing Oudens Knoop Knoop + Sachs Architects, who also served as past chair.

Mr. Schwarzbart also introduced three new prospective members, whose nominations have been forwarded to the County Executive's office:

- **Christine Norris** (replacing **April Birnbaum**) representing Wisconsin Place;
- **Marc Esposito** representing Bloomingdale's; and
- **David Torchinsky** representing the Law Offices of Binstock, Torchinsky and Associates.

Sandra Brecher introduced **Sheila Wilson**, Commuter Services Marketing Specialist, who will be working in the Friendship Heights TMD as part of her responsibilities serving the western part of the county. **Ms. Wilson** has worked as a Transit Specialist with the county since October 1990 and was reassigned a few weeks ago to Friendship Heights Transportation Management District. She helps employers and employees with their commuting transportation needs. **Ms Wilson** passed out her business card to members.

Mr. Schwarzbart announced that he and **Mallory Starr** are beginning their 2nd terms as members of the committee.

Item 4 – Councilmember Q&A: **Mr. Schwarzbart** introduced **Councilmember Nancy Floreen**, a Democrat who was elected as an At Large Member of Montgomery County Council in 2002 and is now in her 2nd term.

Ms. Floreen's efforts as Chair of the Transportation, Infrastructure, Energy and Environment (T&E) Committee have led to increased County transportation funding from the State and, locally, increased county road resurfacing and has supported transit and pedestrian safety initiatives. She is a member of Planning, Housing, and Economic Development (PHED) Committee.

Ms. Floreen co-chairs the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) Climate Change Steering Committee, and also serves on the Air Quality Committee. She is a member of the Maryland Department of Environment and Air Quality Advisory Council and serves on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Council for the Aging.

In 2004 **Ms. Floreen** co-sponsored a \$7.5 million transportation package to buy new buses, add bus routes and hours, reduce fares and build a new garage at the Glenmont Metro. She also accelerated planning for new county roads and co-sponsored a resolution for Federal Government to increase funding for WMATA programs. **Ms. Floreen** fought against closing Beach Drive to MC residents and authored a resolution to support building the Intercounty Connector on the Master Plan Alignment in an effort to reduce traffic congestion.

Ms. Floreen was instrumental in the creation of the Infrastructure Financing Working Group to develop a strategy to raise substantial funds annually for funding the county's infrastructure needs, including new and expanded transit and road projects. She helped with the Senior Transportation Issues Forum, which sponsored revisions to the Road Code making residential and commercial roads safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Before election to the County Council, **Ms. Floreen** served as Parks Commissioner on the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. **Ms. Floreen** also served a Mayor of Garrett Park, where she oversaw a local referendum and bond financing, and she secured county and federal financial support for the renovation of its Town Center, Penn Place.

Ms. Floreen has always promoted improvements of all forms of transportation, while supporting pedestrian and vehicle safety in Montgomery County.

Ms. Floreen explained that success of the community depends on residents voicing needs, and her job is to transfer those needs into solutions that serve the community. She explained that the County has a diverse community but not a lot of cash to meet every need. Montgomery County receives a substantial amount of Federal money and, since all attention has been given to health care legislation, reauthorization of Federal transportation funding has been delayed by about 18 months. She believes that the county should add a gas tax increase to pay for transportation and infrastructure projects. At the state level highway user funds are being used for projects other than transportation, so the goal is to spend all of the funding before it is taken back by the state.

Ms. Floreen commented on the Labor Day Metrorail maintenance, saying this was an example of current infrastructure work. She said that E-Z Pass will be taxed and any new project will probably also be partially user funded, such as the ICC project. Ms. Floreen said many people are not aware of the true cost of transportation, citing the fact that most bus systems recover only a fraction of the expense at the fare box; and roads are funded by developer and highway user fees. The county is not as bad off as other places in the country. However, with declining state and county revenue she does anticipate more cuts in order to adjust the budget. County Council starts deliberating next Tuesday (9/15/09) and, since county funding depends on the state, Council will not be able to predict the full budget until November to see if past expectations have been met.

Ms. Floreen discussed the uniqueness of Friendship Heights, stating that is a mix of suburban and urban areas. She mentioned how that uniqueness played a role in the decision not to build a public garage in Friendship Heights, based on traffic flowing more into the urban District and not into the inner part of Friendship Heights (suburban) to keep balance.

Ms. Floreen praised Commuter Services for working in the details of helping commuters with transit needs as well as helping the environment. She asked **Sandra Brecher** about the percentage number of people using alternative forms of transit in Friendship Heights. **Ms. Brecher** explained that the TMD's purpose is to get a certain percentage of employees using alternative forms of transit other than driving alone to work. The percentage established for Friendship Heights is 39 percent; for Bethesda 37 percent; and for Silver Spring the total is 46 percent. **Ms. Brecher** said achieving these targets tends to change, depending on the numbers of people who respond to the Annual Commuter Survey or when surveys are taken.

Mr. Schwarzbart suggested that the reason why some of the numbers might go down is because of fear of riding the Metro in light of the accident and continuing electrical problems. He believes that problems are due to inadequate oversight, because even though there is a regional Tri-State Oversight Committee, the chair's salary is paid by the District DOT so the committee has no real influence in overseeing the train system. Our local rail system was built the same time and with the same materials as the Bay Area Rapid Transit system (BART) in San Francisco. However, in San Francisco the State of California enacted regulations mandating back up systems to prevent train electrical problems – the same electrical problems that Metro is facing today. **Mr. Schwarzbart** also said that he does not see any move to establish any effective oversight because Metro does not have any money.

Ms. Floreen said that she thought there were very capable people on the Tri-State Oversight Committee, such as former FTA Administrator **Gordon Linton**. She said the beauty of the TMD Advisory Committee and citizen representatives is that "you all are smart and capable of pointing out challenges" that the Council needs to address. **Ms. Floreen** said that the political issues that people hear about because it is easy to report; the hard technical issues are not usually reported because they tend to be too detailed. She also said that there are huge costs that need to be addressed in President Obama's stimulus plan - there is no federal money for long term Metro funding.

Ms. Floreen explained (in reference to **Mr. Schwarzbart's** comments) that the Metro system is not regional like New York/New Jersey, which also has taxing and revenue authority given to an independent body. Our Metro system is unique situation because there are three independent jurisdictions trying to have regional authority, and if it was to switch to a regional authority like NY/NJ that would mean that she and those in her political position would have to use their personal authority to make decisions for the transit system. This would create other problems, because local politicians do not like to give up power: for example, at the Washington Council of Governments (COG) meetings she saw the difficulty involved when even modest transportation programs were awarded on behalf of pressure groups instead of for the larger regional benefit.

Ms. Floreen added that Virginia is more successful at times in getting things done than the county because Virginia locals do not have as much authority as the Montgomery County community. Democracy complicates and slows the process of getting things done. **Ms. Floreen** said please let her know if we have issues with Metro. Unfortunately, we live in a wealthy community in which people have options and are very attached to their automobiles. For example, there was a list serve message from someone who was looking for a car ride to Gallery Place/Judiciary Square/Union Station area, showing that even though there are many Metro transit alternatives people would rather look for rides than take the Metro.

Mr. Schwarzbart reiterated the ineffectiveness of the Tri State Oversight Committee. **Mr. McCloskey** observed that the committee can only make recommendations – it has no direct authority over Metro.

In reference to **Mr. Schwarzbart** comments about the Tri State Oversight's chair being on the District DOT payroll, **Ms. Floreen** said that people are put on committees who are highly educated transportation professionals rather than people from various backgrounds; for instance, WMATA's Board of Directors has people with various transportation backgrounds, but they are also political appointees as well.

Mr. Schwarzbart suggested that the Tri-State Committee should have more independence. He mentioned a story in the news about the committee making six recommendations that WMATA enacted, but without advising the committee. He said that the committee should be independent of Metro for safety matters, which will make Metro safety better than it is today; and giving the committee more independence will not disrupt matters of authority.

David Glass asked **Ms. Floreen** what can be done about Metro funding in light of waiting for Federal funding.

Ms. Floreen said fare and gas tax increases would help because they provide revenue for state transportation. However, she added that the county has no authority to levy a gas tax, only the state.

Mr. McCloskey said there is no guarantee that the money derived from such a tax will go toward transportation. **Ms. Floreen** said that we should support a constitutional amendment that directs the state has to use the funds specifically for transportation issues.

Ms. Floreen reiterated her support for raising the gas tax to pay for transportation projects because the county is the only place in the state that uses user tolls to pay for roads. If we want government services, it is going to cost more money; however the county expenses are less compared to the rest of the country for what we pay for gas. For example, in Europe gas is between 1 and 2 euros (\$2.70) per liter for the cost of an excellent transportation system and good roads. The committee should lobby for transportation revenue increases and decide where the revenue will be spent because there is so much competition due to reduced revenue.

Mr. Schwarzbart asked **Ms. Floreen** her thoughts about the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System. **Ms. Floreen** said that **Councilmember Marc Elrich** is more involved with the project, and it seems like a good idea. Bus operations are significantly subsidized by the county; however, she has seen many empty buses being operated,

which is why the Council funded a study to see if there will even be enough riders to support BRT. She said the problem with transit issues is that the community has not yet decided whether Montgomery County is an urban or suburban area when applying transportation solutions. For example, support for the Purple Line is mainly between Silver Spring and Bethesda, which are urban areas of the county; beyond are suburban areas that show have little support because they drive more. However, ridership numbers may increase because of projected future development in those suburban areas.

Ms. Floreen discussed I-270 traffic congestion between Frederick and Montgomery County. There is a debate regarding solutions. Transit supporters want only transit options for the Multi Model Study. The Council, on the other hand, recommended a plan to add express lanes and transit between Frederick and the Corridor Cities Transitway. This issue will be debated next week.

Mr. McCloskey informed Ms. Floreen about the lack of traffic enforcement in the Friendship Heights area, which has a lot of pedestrians, also many elderly patients entering and exiting the medical offices on Wisconsin Avenue. The committee has asked the county for more crossing time at key intersections. **Ms. Brecher** added that the engineering standard has been changed to allow more time (3.5 ft. per sec. crossing time vs. 4 ft. per sec.), but the lights have not been changed yet. **Ms. Floreen** said to notify her of these long standing issues so she can alert the Council because this is also an issue in Silver Spring. There seems to be a bias in favor of traffic flow, however she believes that the pedestrians are more important than the cars.

Mr. McCloskey said another issue involved people parking on the sidewalk on Friendship Blvd. Complaints to the police department only result in being told that the department can not patrol the area because there are only two patrol cars in the area between Friendship Heights and Potomac at any given hour of the day.

Ms. Floreen said that the TMD has money that could be funding enforcement. Also there are electronic devices that can record tag numbers. **Ms. Brecher** clarified that money comes from developer fees, and Friendship Heights does not have a Parking Lot District (PLD) to fund the TMD. **Ms. Floreen** suggested that money could be transferred from the Bethesda PLD and she will request a meeting on this issue with County Council.

Ms. Brecher asked **Ms. Floreen** about her proposal to use PLD funds for transit.

Ms. Floreen explained that the proposed legislation is to allow more flexibility with PLD funds because they are a good generator of money. Her proposal is to help alleviate the problem of restriction in how PLD funds are spent.

In reference to **Mr. Schwarzbart's** comments about extending traffic light crossing times, **Ms. Floreen** said organizations such as the Advisory Committee provide advice for the County Executive; however, she does not. The County Council does work with the County Executive, which is why it is important not only to work with County staff on issues but also let the County Council know of issues because they can work from a different angle.

Ms. Floreen announced she had to leave for the new Transit Center opening in White Oak. The committee thanked her for coming.

Ms. Brecher passed around the Gazette ad regarding the *Advocates for Alternative Commuting Excellence* (A₂CE) awards, announcing the award winners. She also passed out a matrix as an example of how TMD issues can be tracked to provide for more consistency and organization. She asked that the committee look over the matrix and give ideas to what topics they want to see addressed.

Ms. Brecher also announced that the committee had input on the Montgomery County Government Best Practices and innovative suggestions to help local government document that Ike Leggett forwarded to the White House. The document that can be found on the main county website: www.montgomerycountymd.gov.

Ms. Brecher informed the committee about a managerial session she attended at the Association for Commuter Transportation conference that speaks to Transportation Demand Management (TDM) concerns. What she found interesting was the theme of the impact of social media sites (Facebook, Twitter) on marketing, which she is looking into for opportunities for CSS outreach. **Ms. Brecher** said she would give a presentation at a later date.

Ms. Brecher announced that the Friendship Heights TRiPS Commuter Store is open 11am -7pm; the later hours are to cover evening rush hour. The store has a grand opening scheduled September 30, 2009, which is why there has not been much publicity of the opening.

Item 5 - Illegal Parking –Friendship Blvd: In reference to **Mr. Schwarzbart's** question about the illegal parking issue, **Mr. McCloskey** said the street was configured to accommodate a driveway for Geico's future development, and that people are using the area to park illegally. There are No Standing signs but little police enforcement; DOT will be putting up barriers to stop the illegal parking.

Item 6 - Village Post Office Closing: **Mr. Schwarzbart** stated his concern about the potential closing of the Friendship Heights Post Office, which may cause a transportation burden because so many people - mostly seniors with mobility issues - will have to travel farther with packages and correspondence. The Post Office also services the two medical buildings, which could compromise medical supplies that are shipped in package form. **Mr. Schwarzbart** would like the committee to join this campaign and authorize a letter to stop the closing.

Mr. Glass objected because he believes the Post Office is a dying institution with failing service volume that will lead to cutbacks one way or another, and which will probably be privatized as it has been in other countries. There are other Post Offices nearby and what this letter will eventually mean is some other Post Office may be closed.

Leonard Grant supported writing the letter because nearly one third of the community is over age 65, with a high mobility impaired population. The FH Shuttle stops within a half block of the Post Office. Most people in this community do not drive, so they will not have easy access to the other POs. Also, many foreign individuals send packages from overseas. For example, his son lives in London so he uses the Post Office often.

Mr. Schwarzbart added that Friendship Heights is a hub with a bus terminal, taxi stand and Metro station; also, commercial and medical buildings which will all be effected by the closing.

No action on the closing will be made until September 30th.

5 voted in favor of the letter, 1 opposed and 1 abstained. **Mr. Schwarzbart** will draft the letter.

Meeting adjourned at 10:10 am

Next meeting date: **October 13, 2009**